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# AMERICAN ETHNOLOGY:

BEING A SUMMARY OF SOME OF THE RESULTS WHICH HAVE FOLLOWED  
THE INVESTIGATION OF THIS SUBJECT.

BY E. G. SQUIER.

THE study of man, physiologically and psychically, is confessedly the noblest which can claim human attention; and the results of such study must lie at the basis of all sound organizations, social, civil, or religious. It involves a consideration of all his wants, his capabilities, impulses and ambitions—the manner and the extent in which they are affected by circumstances, and how conditions may be best combined to produce their harmonious and healthy action and development. It has, therefore, the first claim upon the statesman, the reformer, and all those who by position or endowments are placed among the leaders of men.

The study of man, in this comprehensive sense, constitutes the science of Ethnology. The elements of this science are the results, the ultimates of all other sciences; it begins where the rest stop.

“The traveller who examines into the physical characters and mental condition of the families of men with whom he comes in contact; who studies their vocabularies and inquires into their grammar; who is a spectator of their religious observances, and pries into the dark mysteries of their traditions and superstitions; who watches their habits of life, and acquaints himself with their laws and usages—furnishes an important quota to the accumulation of ethnological materials. Scarcely less valuable are the materials collected by him, whose tastes lead him to attend rather to the physiognomy of the country than to that of its human inhabitants; to its climate and its soil, its products and capabilities, rather than to *their* faculties and actions. For in the determination of the important problem, how far the characters of particular races are dependent upon those of the countries which they inhabit, the latter set

of data are as useful as the former; and no satisfactory result can ever be obtained, until both are ascertained with equal accuracy. So again the philologist who is working out, in the solitude of his study, the problems involved in the history and science of Language, though he may little think of connecting his conclusions with the affinities of nations, is an invaluable ally. In the same manner, anatomists and physiologists, in scrutinizing the varieties which the typical form of humanity undergoes, and contrasting the extremes of configuration, of color, and constitutional peculiarity, as observable amongst the inhabitants of distant climes, cannot enlarge the boundaries of their own sciences, without at the same time rendering the most essential assistance to the ethnologist.”\*

Equally valuable with physiological and philological facts, are those which may be gathered from civil history—especially so far as they serve to throw light upon the early seats, the numbers, migrations, conquests, and interblendings of the primary divisions and families of men.

It will be seen from this, that the existence of Ethnology as a science presupposes a general high attainment in all other departments of knowledge. It is essentially the science of the age; the offspring of that prevailing mental and physical energy which neglects no subject of inquiry, and which brings the minutest points of the world, its most widely separated and diverse nations, with some knowledge of their history, institutions and condition, at once under view, enabling the student to arrive at conclusions under no other circumstances attainable. The ancient philosophers, even the philosophers of th

\* Edinburgh Review, Am. Ed. vol. xxix, p. 223.



last age, whose horizons were comparatively limited, were unable to bring within the range of their vision that number and variety of facts indispensable to the grand generalizations of ethnological science. With every succeeding year, however, the difficulties which have obstructed, and still continue to obstruct the advance of Ethnology, will become fewer and less formidable; and though ages may be requisite to its full development, yet henceforth it will present the first claim upon the attention of the enlightened world.

Amongst the investigators who have contributed most largely towards giving this science its present prominence and high distinction, it is a matter of just pride to know that America has furnished some of the most distinguished, if it may not indeed be claimed that she has furnished the greatest number. Nor is the circumstance surprising; for nowhere else on the globe is afforded so wide and so favorable a field for researches of this nature. Nowhere else can we find brought in so close proximity, the representatives of races and families of men, of origins and physical and mental constitutions so diverse. Within the boundaries of our own country, *three* at least of the five grand divisions into which the human family is usually grouped, are fully represented. The contrasts which they present, and the singular results which have followed their contact, are too striking to be overlooked by the philosophical observer. Upon this continent also is found a grand division of the human race whose history is involved in night, and the secret of whose origin and connections affords a constant stimulus to investigations of a strictly ethnological character.

For these reasons, we may claim that Ethnology is not only the science of the age, but also that it is, and must continue to be, to a prevailing extent, an *American science*. Do we seek to know the course and progress of development among a people separated from the rest of the world, insulated physically and mentally, and left to the operation of its own peculiar elements? The inquirer must turn to America, where alone he can hope to find the primitive conceptions, beliefs and practices of an entire original people, in no considerable degree modified or impaired

by the adventitious circumstances of intermixture or association. Do we desire to discover the results which must follow from the blending of men of different races and families? Do we inquire in what consists the superiority of certain families over others; to what extent they may assimilate with, to what repel each other, and how their relations may be adjusted so as to produce the greatest attainable advantage to both? The practical solution of these problems can only be found in America, where alone exist the requisite conjunctions.

The inquiries of American ethnologists have not, however, been exclusively confined to America, nor is the eminence they have attained entirely due to the advantages of the ethnological field in which they are placed. It was left to an American (Dr. Morton) to determine the ethnological position of the ancient Egyptians, and to settle finally what for centuries had been in dispute, that the ancient inhabitants of Egypt were Caucasians, and not negroes, and that the germs of the civilization of that country came from the northward, and did not descend the valley of the Nile.\*

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\* The subjoined are some of the principal conclusions to which Dr. Morton's investigation of this subject have led.

"1. The valley of the Nile, both in Egypt and in Nubia, was originally peopled by a branch of the Caucasian race.

"2. These primeval people, since called Egyptians, were the Mizrimites of Scripture, the posterity of Ham, and directly affiliated with the Libyan family of nations.

"3. In their physical character the Egyptians were intermediate between the Indo-European and Semitic races.

"4. The Austral-Egyptian, or Meroite communities were an Indo-Arabian stock engrafted on the primitive Libyan inhabitants.

"5. Besides these exotic sources of population, the Egyptian race was at different periods modified by the influx of the Caucasian nations of Asia and Europe—Pelasgi or Hellenes, Scythians, and Phœnicians.

"6. Kings of Egypt appear to have been incidentally derived from each of the above nations.

"7. The Copts, in part at least, are a mixture of the Caucasian and the Negro in extremely variable proportions.

"8. Negroes were numerous in Egypt; but their social position in ancient times was the same that it now is, that of servants and slaves.

"9. The national characteristics of all these families of man are distinctly figured on the mon-

It is not our purpose to go into a detailed exposition of what our countrymen have accomplished in ethnological science; but we cannot omit a brief reference to some of the more prominent results of their labors.

In the departments of physiology and philology their investigations have been conducted on a large scale, and in a very complete and thorough manner, and with eminent success. The craniological inquiries of Dr. S. G. MORTON, as presented in that splendid monument of scientific research, "*Crania Americana*," have attracted an amount of attention second to none others of similar character.\*

uments; and all of them, excepting the Scythians and Phenicians, have been identified in the catacombs.

"10. The present Fellahs are the lineal and least mixed descendants of the ancient Egyptians; and the latter are collaterally represented by the Tuaricks, Kabyles, Siwabs, and other remains of the Libyan family of nations.

"11. The modern Nubians, with a few exceptions, are not the descendants of the monumental Ethiopians, but a variously mixed race of Arabs and negroes.

And that "the physical or organic characters which distinguish the several races of men, are as old as the oldest records of our species."

\*"This work," (*Crania Americana*), says the learned Prichard, "far exceeds in its comprehensiveness, and in the number and beauty of its engravings, any European work that has as yet appeared on natural varieties of the skull, and comprises nearly the sum of our information on the distinctive characters of the head and skeleton in the several tribes of the new world." The same distinguished authority observes of Dr. Morton's "*Crania Aegyptiaca*,"—"A most interesting and really important addition has lately been made to our knowledge of the physical characters of the ancient Egyptians, from a quarter where local probabilities would least of all have induced us to look for it. In France, where so many scientific men have been devoted, ever since the conquest of Egypt by Napoleon, for a long time under the patronage of the government, to researches in the subject; in England, possessed of the immense advantages of wealth and commercial resources; in the academies of Italy and Germany, where the arts of Egypt have been studied in national museums, scarcely any thing has been done, since the time of Blumenbach, to elucidate the physical history of the ancient Egyptian race. In none of these countries have any extensive collections been made of the materials and resources which alone can afford secure foundation for such attempts. It is in the United States of America that a remarkable advancement in this part of physical science has at length been achieved."

The results relating to the aboriginal families of this continent, have long been known to the scientific world, and have met the general concurrence of scientific men.

It has been remarked that Asia is the country of fables, Africa of monsters, and America of systems, to those who prefer hypothesis to truth; and it is these alone who still continue audaciously to speculate upon the origin and connections of the American race, as though no grand leading points had been established, and as though there was afforded a legitimate field for unrestrained conjecture. The questions thus mooted are such as can only be determined by a large number of concurrent facts of different kinds; but still, so far as cranial characteristics are concerned, we may regard the conclusions advanced by Dr. Morton as substantially demonstrated, and look upon them as so many fixed points whereby to govern our further investigations. His general conclusions, upon which all the others in some manner depend, is the essential peculiarity of the American race; that the American nations, excepting perhaps those on the extremities of the continent, (and concerning which no sufficient data have as yet been collected to justify an opinion,) are characterized by a conformation of skull radically distinct from that of any of the other great divisions of the human family. To use Dr. Morton's own language, his observations and researches tend to sustain the following propositions:

"1st. That the American race differs essentially from all others, not excepting the Mongolian; nor do the feeble analogies of language, and the more obvious ones of civil

With what perseverance and success Dr. Morton's investigations have been conducted, may be inferred from the fact, that his collection of crania, now deposited in the Academy of Natural Sciences, at Philadelphia, is not only the largest in the world, but neither public nor private cabinets in any country, contain a tithe of his materials or varieties; all obtained at his individual expense, and rapidly increasing by contributions from every part of the globe. The impetus which this investigation has given to science in this department has been sensibly felt abroad, and has induced the Emperor of Russia to found, at St. Petersburg, a national museum exclusively dedicated to craniology, to contain the skulls of all the ancient and modern races of his vast dominions.



and religious institutions and the arts, denote any thing beyond casual or colonial communication with the Asiatic nations ; and even these analogies may perhaps be accounted for, as Humboldt has suggested, in the mere coincidence arising from similar wants and impulses in nations inhabiting similar latitudes.

"2d. That the American nations, excepting the polar tribes, are of one race and one species, but of two great families, which resemble each other in physical but differ in intellectual character.

"3d. That the cranial remains discovered in the mounds from Peru to Wisconsin belong to the same race, and probably to the Toltecan family."\*

No doubt the inquirer, at first glance, would be somewhat startled at these propositions, and incredulously point to the disparities existing between the various families of the continent as affording a sufficient refutation of them. When, however, we separate what is radical from what is incidental, or the result of circumstances, it will be found that these diversities are superficial, and that elementarily the various natives of the continent exhibit identities of the most striking kind. This is true, not only of their physical characteristics, but of their languages and their religions. And if we can point to no other race on the globe which has exhibited so many modifications, it is because there is no other which in its infancy, and before it was able to overcome or control natural influences, was so widely disseminated, and subjected to so many vicissitudes. History, nevertheless, has some singular examples of the changes which may be occasioned by circumstances, not only among nations of the same race, but of the same family. Dr. Morton points us to that branch of the great Arabian stock, the Saracens, "who established their seat in Spain, whose history is replete with romance and refinement, whose colleges were the centres of genius and learning for several centuries, and whose arts and sciences have been blended with those of every succeeding age. Yet the Saracens belonged to the same family with the Bedouins of the desert ; those intractable barbarians who scorn all restraints which

are not imposed by their own chief, and whose immemorial laws forbid them to sow corn, to plant fruit-trees, or build houses, in order that nothing may conflict with those roving and predatory habits which have continued unaltered through a period of three thousand years."\*

That resemblances should gradually arise among nations of entirely different origins, under the influence of concurring conditions, is very obvious.

"It would indeed be not only singular, but wonderful and unaccountable," observes an eminent authority, "if tribes and nations of men, possessed of similar attributes of mind and body, residing in similar climates and situations, influenced by similar states of society, and obliged to support themselves by similar means, in similar pursuits—it would form a problem altogether inexplicable, if nations thus situated did not contract habits and usages, and, instinctively, modes of life and action, possessing towards each other many striking resemblances." The converse of this is equally true ; and if admitted, it is only necessary to show a radical resemblance in certain important features between the various American families and nations, and their difference in the same respects from other races, in order to the complete demonstration of their essential homogeneity, and their distinct position as a separate people.

Having presented the compressed results of Dr. Morton's investigations, it is but just that he should be allowed to speak more fully upon the points in question. "It is an adage among travellers, that he who has seen one tribe of Indians has seen all ; so much do the individuals of this race resemble each other, notwithstanding their immense geographical distribution, and those differences of climate which embrace the extremes of heat and cold. The half-clad Fuegian, shrinking from his dreary winter, has the same characteristic lineaments, though in an exaggerated degree, as the Indians of the tropical plains ; and these again resemble the tribes which inhabit the region west of the Rocky Mountains, those of the great valley of the Mississippi, and those again which

\* *Crania Americana*, page 260.

\* *Distinctive Characteristics of the American Race*, p. 15.



skirt the Esquimaux on the north. All possess alike the long, lank, black hair, the brown or cinnamon-colored skin, the heavy brow, the dull and sleepy eye, the full and compressed lips, and the salient and dilated nose. These traits, moreover, are equally common to the savage and civilized nations, whether they inhabit the margins of rivers and feed on fish, or rove the forest and subsist on the spoils of the chase.

"It cannot be questioned that physical diversities do occur equally singular and inexplicable, as seen in the different shades of color, varying from a fair tint to a complexion almost black; and this, too, under circumstances where climate can have little or no influence. So also in reference to stature, the differences are remarkable in entire tribes, which moreover are geographically proximate to each other. These facts are, however, mere exceptions to a general rule, and do not alter the peculiar physiognomy of the Indian, which is as undeviatingly characteristic as that of the negro; for whether we see him in the athletic Charib or the stunted Chayma, in the dark Californian or the fair Borroa, he is an Indian still, and cannot be mistaken for a being of any other race.

"The same conformity of organization is not less obvious in the osteological structure of these people, as seen in the squared or rounded head, the flattened or vertical occiput, the high cheek-bones, the ponderous maxillæ, the large, quadrangular orbits, and the low, receding forehead."\*

These results, put forward upon the basis of a large array of carefully collected and well-digested facts, are well sustained by the opinions of other investigators, whose means of observation were very extended, and whose judgments will not lightly be called in question. Says Humboldt: "The Indians of New Spain bear a general resemblance to those who inhabit Canada, Florida, Peru, and Brazil. They have the same swarthy and copper color, straight and smooth hair, small beard, prominent cheek-bones, thick lips, expression of gentleness in the mouth strongly contrasted with a gloomy and

severe look. \* \* \* Over a million and a half of square miles, from Terra del Fuego to the River St. Lawrence and Behring's Straits, we are struck, at first glance, with the general resemblance in the features of the inhabitants. We think that we perceive them all to be descended from the same stock, notwithstanding the prodigious diversity of language which separates them from one another. \* \*

In the faithful portrait which an excellent observer, M. Volney, has drawn of the Canada Indians, we undoubtedly recognize the tribes scattered in the savannahs of the Rio Apure and the Carony. The same style of features exists in both Americas."

Dr. Prichard, after a careful review of the same field, presents the following concurrent inferences:

"1. That all the different races, aboriginal in the American continent, or constituting its earliest known population, belong, as far as their history and languages have been investigated, to one family of nations.

"2. That these races display considerable diversities in their physical constitution, though derived from one stock, and still betraying indications of mutual resemblance."

In solitary, and, we had almost said, utterly unsupported opposition to this general testimony in favor of the physical uniformity of the American race, stands the assertion of M. d'Orbigny, that "a Peruvian is not less different from a Patagonian, and a Patagonian from a Guarani, than is a Greek from an Ethiopian or a Mongolian."\*

\* *L'Homme Américain*, &c., vol. i, p. 122. It is proper to observe that M. d'Orbigny does not probably mean to be understood that there are radical differences among the South American nations, as marked as a literal understanding of this paragraph would imply. For there is no writer who attributes more striking results to the influence of natural causes. He states that the color of the South American nations bears a very decided relation to the dampness or dryness of the atmosphere. People who dwell forever under the shade of dense and lofty forests, clothing the dark valleys which lie under the steep declivities of the eastern branches of the Cordilleras, and the vast, luxuriant plains of the Orinoco and Maragón, are comparatively white; while the Quichua, exposed to the solar heat in dry, open spaces of the mountains, are of a much deeper

\* Inquiry into the Distinctive Characteristics of the Aboriginal Race of America.

It seems very probable that the distinctive character of the American families would never have been called in question, had it not been for the necessity which many learned and pious men have thought to be imposed by the Bible, of deriving all varieties of the human species from a single pair on the banks of the Euphrates. Taking it for granted that the Indians are descendants of some one or more of the diversified nations to which earliest history refers, they directed their inquiries to *which* of these their progenitors might be with most exactness referred. The hypotheses to which these assumptions have given rise are almost innumerable. That ascribing to them a Jewish origin has received the widest assent, not because it is a whit better supported than any of the others, but simply because the knowledge which is generally possessed of the character, habits, customs, etc. etc. of primitive nations is derived from the scriptural account of the Jews. Forgetting that all people, at some stage of their advancement, must sustain many resemblances towards each other, resulting, as already asserted, from a coincidence in circumstances, they have founded their conclusions upon what is conditional and changing, instead of what is fixed and radical. "They have," in the language of the philosophical Warburton, "the old, inveterate error, that a similitude of customs and manners, amongst the various tribes of mankind most remote from each other, must needs arise from some communication. Whereas human nature, without any help, will in the same circumstances always exhibit the same appearances."\*

Passing by these hypotheses with the remark that most are absurd and many impossible, we return to what may be regarded as fixed in conformity with those essential principles upon which alone sound philosophical researches can be conducted. So far as physical traits and craniological characteristics extend, we have the conclusions of Dr. Morton and others, already presented in a previous page. Regarding these as amply sustained by the great number and variety of facts which have

been made public, and which have never been disputed, we turn next to the department of philology. Here we find the results of the investigations of a number of learned men, among whom the venerable Albert Gallatin stands pre-eminent. The researches of this gentleman have been mostly confined to the languages of the North American nations, but he has got together and carefully digested a mass of material upon this somewhat abstruse subject, as much exceeding in extent and value the results of the labors of his predecessors in the same field, as the data collected by Dr. Morton exceeds those of other investigators in his peculiar department. But as we are dealing only with results, it is foreign to our purpose to do much more than present Mr. Gallatin's conclusions. These are substantially the same with those arrived at by Dr. Morton, although attained by a different path of investigation. He finds the languages of North America, notwithstanding their apparent diversity, to be in their elements *sui generis*, and radically the same: that is to say, characterized throughout (with casual exceptions easily accounted for) by a construction and combination entirely peculiar. Says Mr. Gallatin, "The investigation of the languages of the Indians within the United States, east of the Rocky Mountains and north of the States, as far as the Polar Sea, has satisfactorily shown that, however dissimilar their words, their structure and grammatical forms are substantially the same. A general examination of the Mexican proper, and of the languages of Peru, of Chili, and of some other tribes of South America, has rendered it probable that, in that respect, all or nearly all the languages of America belong to the same family. This, if satisfactorily ascertained, would, connected with the similarity of physical type, prove a general, though not perhaps universal, common origin."\* Later investigations of the languages of the Indians of the Pacific coast, whose vocabularies were not sufficiently complete to justify a conclusion respecting them, at the time this paragraph was written, have shown, according to the same authority, that, "In their grammatical characteristics, so far as these

shade. This is confirmed by Schomburgk and other accurate observers.

\* Divine Legation of Moses, vol. iii. p. 991.

\* Notes on the Semi-civilized Nations of Central America, &c., p. 10.



can be determined, they belong to the same class as the other aboriginal Indians of America. Many of the forms are precisely the same as those which occur in the languages of the eastern and southern tribes of the continent." The casual resemblances of certain words in the languages of America, and those of the Old World, cannot be taken as evidences of a common origin. Such coincidences may easily be accounted for as the results of accident, or, at most, of local infusions, which were without any extended effect. The entire number of common words is said to be, one hundred and eighty-seven; of these, one-hundred and four coincide with words found in the languages of Asia and Australia; forty-three with those of Europe, and forty with those of Africa. It can hardly be supposed that these facts are sufficient to prove a connection between the four hundred dialects of America, and the various languages of the other continent.\* It is, as observed by Mr. Gallatin, not in accidental coincidences of sound or meaning, but in a comparison of the general structure and character of the American languages with those of other countries, that we can expect to find similitudes at all conclusive or worthy of remark, in determining the question of a common origin. And it is precisely in these respects that we discover the strongest evidences of the essential peculiarity of the American languages; here they coincide with each other, and here exhibit the most striking contrasts with all the others of the globe. The diversities which have sprung up, and which have resulted in so many dialectical modifications, as shown in the numberless vocabularies, furnish a wide field of investigation. Mr. Gallatin draws a conclusion from the circumstance, which is quite as fatal to the popular hypotheses respecting the origin of the Indians, as the more sweeping conclusions of Dr. Morton. It is the length of time which this prodigious subdivision of languages in America must have required, making every allowance for the greater changes to which unwritten languages are liable, and for the necessary breaking up of nations in a hunter state, into separate communities. For these

changes, or modifications, Mr. Gallatin claims we must have the very longest time which we are permitted to assume; and if it is considered necessary to derive the American race from the other continent, that the migration must have taken place at the earliest assignable period.

These conclusions were advanced by Mr. Duponceau as early as 1819, in substantially the following language:

1. That the American languages in general are rich in words and grammatical forms; and that, in their complicated construction, the greatest order, method and regularity prevail.

2. That these complicated forms, which he calls polysynthetic, appear to exist in all these languages from Greenland to Cape Horn.

3. That these forms differ essentially from those of the ancient and modern languages of the old hemisphere.

It is, however, but just to observe, that the credit of having first discovered the remarkable phenomena which the American system of languages presents, is probably due to the learned Vater, to whom the eminent Adelung left the work of completing the Mithridates or "Allgemeine Sprachenkunde." He observes: "In Greenland as well as in Peru, on the Hudson River, in Massachusetts as well as in Mexico, and as far as the banks of the Orinoco, languages are spoken displaying forms more artfully distinguished, and more numerous, than almost any other idioms in the world possess." \* \* \* "When we consider these artfully and laboriously contrived languages, which, though existing at points separated from each other by so many thousands of miles, have assumed a character not less remarkably similar among themselves, than different from the principles of all other languages, it is certainly the most natural conclusion, that these common methods of construction have their origin from a single point; and that there has been one general source from which the culture of languages in America has been diffused, and which has been the common centre of its diversified idioms."

The same phenomena was adverted to by Humboldt, whose authority carries with it vast weight in all that relates to America. He says: "In America, (and this result of

\* Morton's *Distinctive Characteristics*, &c., p. 17.

modern researches is extremely important with respect to the history of our species,) from the country of the Esquimaux to the banks of the Orinoco, and, again, from these torrid banks to the frozen straits of Magellan, mother tongues, entirely different with regard to their roots, have, if we may use the expression, the same physiognomy. Striking analogies of grammatical construction are acknowledged, not only in the more perfect languages, as that of the Incas, the Aymara, the Guarini, the Mexican and the Cora, but also in languages extremely rude. Idioms, the roots of which do not resemble each other more than the roots of the Slavonian and Biscayan, have those resemblances of internal mechanism which are found in the Sanscrit, the Greek and the German languages.

\* \* \* It is on account of their general analogy in structure ; it is because American languages which have no word in common, (the Mexican, for instance, and the Quichua,) resemble each other by their organization, and form complete contrasts with other languages of the globe, that the Indians of the missions familiarize themselves more easily with other American idioms, than with the language of the mistress country.”\*

It is not necessary to multiply authorities upon this point ; for it is worthy of remark that every philologist of distinction who has investigated the subject, has arrived at precisely the same conclusions ; although few have ventured to make public the deductions to which they inevitably lead. The doctrine of a diversity of origin in the human race, although gathering supporters daily, has yet so few open advocates, and is generally esteemed so radical a heresy, that investigators in this, as in many other departments of science, hesitate in pushing their researches to their ultimate results. The discussion of the question cannot, however, be long postponed, and it is not difficult to foresee in what manner it will be finally determined.

It should be observed, further, that although all the American languages possess common elementary features and powers, many of the different vocabularies sustain towards each other still closer

resemblances, authorizing their arrangement into groups ; and, in conjunction with other circumstances, forming the basis of the aggregation of scattered tribes into families, designated as the Algonquin, Irroquois, etc. Within these groups there are not only grammatical but verbal resemblances, easily detected, notwithstanding that they extend over regions of the continent as wide as those which fall within the range of the most extensively dispersed languages of the Old World. We cannot however go into a detailed notice of these, nor yet of the general characteristics of the American languages.\*

Such are some of the leading results of physiological and philological inquiries relating to the aboriginal inhabitants of America. It yet remains to be seen how far an investigation of their religious conceptions and notions shall serve to confirm these results. This will prove an inquiry of great difficulty ; for if we assume that the religious sentiment is inherent, and its expression in accordance with natural suggestions—then the nearer we approach the first stages of human development, the more numerous and the more striking will be the coincidences and resemblances in the various religions of the globe, however widely they may appear to differ at the present time. If, however, we shall find a general concurrence in what may be ascertained to be conventional or arbitrary in the various religious systems, then we may reasonably infer a community of origins, or a connection more or less remote.

As the result of a pretty extended investigation of the subject, it may be affirmed that the predominant religious conceptions of America have found their expression in some modification of what is usually denominated “Sun worship,” but which might with more propriety be defined to be an adoration of the powers of Nature. This seems to have been, throughout the globe, the earliest form of human

\* Those who desire minutely to investigate the subject, will find ample materials in the “Mithridates” of Adelung and Vater, Gallatin on the Indian Tribes, (second volume of the Transactions of the American Antiquarian Society,) Duponceau’s Correspondence with Heckewelder, (Transactions of the Literary and Historical Department of the American Philosophical Soc.,) Transactions of the American Ethnological Soc., vols. i. and ii., etc.



superstition, dating back far beyond the historical, and even beyond the traditional period of man's existence. It lies at the basis of all the primitive mythological systems with which we are acquainted, and may still be found under a complication of later engraftments and refinements, derivative and otherwise, in the religions of Hindustan. It may be traced, in America, from its simplest or least clearly defined form, among the roving hunters and squalid Esquimaux of the North, through every intermediate stage of development, to the imposing systems of Mexico and Peru, where it took a form nearly corresponding with that which it at one time sustained on the banks of the Ganges, and on the plains of Assyria. The evidence in support of these assertions is far too voluminous to be adduced here; it would, besides, involve preliminary and collateral discussions, into which it would be out of place to enter in a popular periodical. Upon the assumption that we are correct, there is, from our point of view, no difficulty in accounting for these identities, without claiming a common origin for the nations displaying them. Alike in the elements of their mental and moral constitutions; having common hopes and aspirations, whatever the form which, from the force of circumstances they may have assumed; moved by the same impulses, and actuated by similar motives, is it surprising that there should exist among nations of men the most widely separated, a wonderful unity of elementary beliefs and conceptions? All have before them the suggestions of Nature, the grand phenomena of which are everywhere the same; and all from their observance would be apt to arrive at similar results. The idea of a beginning and of a creative power is clearly stamped upon all nature, and, in an obscure or more distinct form, is an inevitable result of human reasoning. This assertion may be controverted by those who esteem this grand conception inherent, or the result of divine communications; but all are agreed that it is as universal as man. The simplicity of the original conception no doubt became greatly modified in the course of time. As the first step of religious refinement, the First Principle came to be invested with attributes which were commemorated and adapted to the com-

prehension of men through the medium of symbols; God came to be emblemized under a variety of aspects, as God the Life-giver, God the Omnipotent, the Eternal, the Beneficent, the Vigilant, the Destroyer, the Avenger. That this refinement in some instances degenerated from apparent into actual polytheism cannot be doubted; but the instances will be found less common than is generally supposed, when we come to analyze the predominant religions of the globe. That a variety of symbols, all referring to the same great principle, yet having, to the superficial view, no relation to each other, resulted from this process, is therefore no matter of surprise.

In the absence of a written language or of forms of expression capable of conveying abstract ideas, we can readily comprehend the necessity, among a primitive people, of a symbolic system. That symbolism in a great degree resulted from this necessity, is very obvious; and that, associated with man's primitive religious systems, it was afterwards continued, when, in the advanced stage of the human mind, the previous necessity no longer existed, is equally undoubted. It thus came to constitute a kind of sacred language, and becomes invested with an esoteric significance, understood only by the few. With the mass of men, the meanings of the original emblem, or the reason for its adoption—the necessity for its use being superseded—was finally forgotten, or but imperfectly remembered. A superstitious reverence, the consequence of long association, and encouraged by a cunning priesthood, nevertheless continued to attach to the symbol, which, from being the representation of an adorable attribute or manifestation of God, became itself an object of adoration. Such was the origin of idolatry in its common or technical sense.\*

\* "The learned Brahmans," observes Mr. Erskine, acknowledge and adore one God, without form or quality, eternal, unchangeable, and occupying all space; yet they teach in public a religion in which, in supposed compliance with the infirmities and passions of human nature, the Deity has been brought more to a level with our own prejudices and wants, and the incomprehensible attributes assigned to him invested with sensible and even human forms." (*Colman's Hindu Mythology*, p. 1.) The Brahmans allege "that it is easier to impress the minds of men by

The necessity for a symbolical system, which we have assumed as consequent upon man's primitive circumstances, existed alike amongst all early nations; and as the result of that uniformity of mental and moral constitution, and of physical circumstances to which we have referred, their symbols possessed a like uniformity. We may take an example. The SUN, the dispenser of heat and light, the vivifier, beneficent and genial in its influences, the most obvious, as it is the most potent and glorious object in the natural creation, fitly and almost universally emblemized the First Principle. With its annually returning strength the germs quickened, the leaves and blossoms unfolded themselves; and beneath its glow the fruits ripened, and the earth was full of luxuriance and life. Under this aspect it was God the Life-giver, God the Beneficent. In its unwearied course, its daily journey through the skies, it symbolized the Eternal God. In its dazzling and intense splendor it reflected the matchless glories of the Being whose unveiled face "no man can see and live." It is therefore no matter of surprise that sun-worship was among the earliest and most widely disseminated forms of human adoration. It may be said to have been universal. Among nations the most remote from each other, from the torrid to the frigid zones, under one modification or another, this worship has existed. As Phre, or Serapis, among the Egyptians; as Bel,

Baal, Belus, or Moloch, among the Chaldeans; Mithras of the Persians; Apollo of the Greeks; Suyra of the Hindoos; Odin of the Scandinavians; Baiwe of the Laplanders; or, as the chief object of adoration in Mexico and Peru, the sun has had its myriads of worshippers from the earliest dawn of traditionary history. Its worship spread over America as it did over Europe and Africa, and man's accredited birthplace in Asia. It was attended by simple, as also by complicated ceremonies. The Indian hunter of North America acknowledged his homage in silence, with uplifted arms and outspread palms, or by a breath from his half sacred pipe. And the Peruvian Inca, "the Son of the Sun," in his double office of priest and king, paid his adoration, with gorgeous rites, in temples encrusted with gold, and blazing with the reflected glory of the solar god.

Regarding then the uniformity which we have already pointed out in man's constitution, attended by a like uniformity of natural circumstances, as resulting almost of necessity in corresponding uniformity in his beliefs and conceptions, and their modes of manifestation, we shall be prepared to find in America the traces of a primitive religion, essentially the same with that which underwent so many modifications in the Old World, illustrated by analogous symbols, and attended by similar rites. We shall further be prepared to remark these resemblances as the natural results of fixed causes, without sinking the Atlantides in an overwhelming cataclysm, or leading vagrant tribes "through deserts vast, and regions of eternal snow;" or invoking the shadowy Thorfinn, or the apocryphal "Madoc, with his ten ships," to account for the form of a sacrifice, or the method of an incantation!

Having entered this *caveat* against any attempt which might be made to press the admission, or rather the assertion, of a close correspondence between the religious systems of the Old and New Worlds, into the support of the popular hypothesis which derives the aborigines of America from Tartary, Hindustan, or the shores of the Mediterranean, we return to the matters in hand, merely observing that the subject here touched upon is one of

intelligible symbols than by means which are incomprehensible."

"In India the powers of nature are personified, and each quality, mental and physical, had its emblem, which the Brahmins taught the ignorant to regard as realities, till the Pantheon became so crowded, that life would be too short to acquire even the nomenclature of their 33,000,000 of gods."—*Tod's Rajast'han*, vol. i, p. 536.

Savary, noticing the corruptions of the religion of Egypt, observes: "It was not the intent of the priesthood at first to enslave their nation to the wretched superstition that did prevail. The necessity of expressing themselves by allegorical fables, before the invention of letters, and the keeping of these representations in their temples, accustomed the people to hold them sacred. When writing became familiar, and they had wholly forgot their first meaning, they no longer set bounds to their veneration, but actually worshipped symbols which their fathers had only honored."—*Savary's Egypt*, letter xxix.



high interest, and deserving a thorough investigation.

The inquiries of students in the department of psychology, so far as the American race is concerned, have not been productive of any satisfactory results. This is not surprising, in consideration of the subtle nature of the elements to which they must be directed. Such investigations cannot probably be pursued with any degree of confidence, until it is determined how far man is a creature of circumstances, and whether, as a general rule, and dealing with aggregates, families of men may not, when subjected to like influences for long periods, exhibit very nearly, if not precisely, the same psychological aspects. History is not *old enough* to enable us to speak confidently upon so profound a subject. Except by interblendings, the great races of men having, *physiologically*, retained their essential features from the earliest periods with which we are acquainted. Analogy, it might be said, would imply that, *psychically*, the same law holds good. But if we assent to this, we must deny the power of mental development; deny that in his higher nature man is capable of infinite progression. "By taking thought, no man can make one hair white or black," but he may carry his intellectual attainments to unsuspected heights. All psychical development must of necessity be in a single direction, and must pass through precisely the same stages, whenever an advance is made.

It may be said that some families are fierce—others mild; but it is by no means certain that a reversal in the circumstances under which they are placed would not change the destructive savage into the mild agriculturist, and the peaceable tiller of the soil into the fierce and predatory nomad.

Dr. Morton says of the moral traits of the American aborigines: "Among the the most prominent, is a sleepless caution, an untiring vigilance, which presides over every action, and marks every motive. The Indian says nothing and does nothing without its influence; it enables him to deceive others without being himself suspected; it causes that proverbial taciturnity among strangers, which changes to garrulity among people of his own tribe;

and it is the basis of that invincible firmness which teaches him to contend unrepiningly with every adverse circumstance, and even with death in its most hideous form." The same author adduces the love of war, as another characteristic trait, which develops itself on all occasions, and continues: "It may be said that these features of the Indian character are common to all mankind in the savage state. This is generally true, but they exist in the American race in a degree which will fairly challenge a comparison with similar traits in any existing people; and if we consider also their habitual indolence and improvidence, their indifference to private property, and the vague simplicity of their religious observances, we must admit them to possess a peculiar and eccentric moral constitution." Dr. Morton notices the exceptions which the Peruvians and other nations seem to exhibit, but attributes their changed condition to the far-seeing policy of the Incas, and the combination of circumstances which they brought to bear upon the Indian mind. "After the Inca power was destroyed," he says, "the dormant spirit of the people was again aroused in all the moral vehemence of the race, and the gentle and unoffending Peruvian became transformed into the wily and merciless savage."

In respect to the intellectual character of the American race, the same authority observes: "It is my matured conviction, that as a race they are decidedly inferior to the Mongolian stock. They are not only averse to the restraints of education, but seem for the most part incapable of a continued process of reasoning on abstract subjects. Their minds seize with avidity on simple truths, while they reject whatever requires investigation or analysis. Their proximity for more than two centuries to European communities, has scarcely affected an appreciable change in their manner of life, and as to their social condition, they are probably in most respects the same as at the primitive epoch of their existence. They have made no improvements in the construction of their dwellings, except when directed by Europeans. Their imitative faculty is of a very humble grade, nor have they any predilection for the arts and sciences. The long annals of

missionary labor and private benefaction present few exceptions to this cheerless picture, which is sustained by the testimony of nearly all practical observers." From these remarks, however, Dr. Morton excepts those nations which fall within what he denominates the "Toltecan Family." "Contrasted with the intellectual poverty of the barbarous tribes, like an oasis in a desert, are the demi-civilized nations of the New World, a people whose attainment in the arts and sciences are a riddle in the history of the human mind. The Peruvians in the south, the Mexicans in the north, and the Muyscas of Bogota between the two, formed these contemporary centres of civilization, each independent of the other, and each equally skirted by wild and savage hordes. The mind dwells with surprise and admiration on their cyclopean structures, which often rival those of Egypt in magnitude; on their temples, which embrace almost every principle of architecture; and on their statues and bas-reliefs, which are far above the rudimentary state of the arts. \* \* \*

It follows of course, from the preceding remarks, that we consider the American race to present the two extremes of intellectual character; the one capable of a certain degree of civilization and refinement, independent of extraneous aids, the other exhibiting an abasement which puts all mental culture at defiance. The one composed, as it were, of a handful of people, whose superiority and consequent acquisitions made them the prey of covetous destroyers; the other a vast multitude of savage tribes, whose very barbarism is working their destruction from within and without."

A learned German traveller, Dr. Von Martius, whose works on the nations of South America, as observed by Prichard, are well known and highly appreciated, has in strong terms asserted that a psychological difference exists between the American race and those of the Old World. He has sketched his hypothesis with a bold hand, and with a force which we seldom find surpassed in writings upon these subjects.

"The indigenous race of the New World is distinguished from all the other nations of the earth, externally, by peculiarities of make,

but still more, internally, by their state of mind and intellect. The aboriginal American is at once in the incapacity of infancy and unpliancy of old age; he unites the opposite poles of intellectual life. This strange and inexplicable condition has hitherto frustrated every attempt to reconcile him with the European, to whom he gives way, so as to make him a cheerful and happy member of the community; and it is this, his double nature, which presents the greatest difficulty to Science when she endeavors to investigate his origin, and those earlier epochs of history, in which he has for thousands of years moved indeed, but made no improvements in his condition. But this is far removed from that natural state of child-like security which marked (as an inward voice declares to us, and as the most ancient written documents affirm) the first and foremost period of the history of mankind. The men of the red race, on the contrary, it must be confessed, do not appear to feel the blessings of a divine descent, but to have been led by merely animal instinct and tardy steps through a dark past to their actual cheerless present. Much, therefore, seems to indicate that they are not in the first stage of that simple, we might say, physical development—that they are in a secondary, regenerated state.

"To guide the inquirer through the intricacies of this labyrinthine inquiry, there is not a vestige of history to afford any clue. Not a ray of tradition, not a war-song, not a funeral lay can be found to clear away the dark night in which the earlier ages of America are involved.

"Far beyond the rude condition in which the aboriginal American was found, and separated by the obscurity of ages, lies a nobler past which he once enjoyed, but which can now only be inferred from a few relics. Colossal works of architecture (as those at Tiaguanico on the Lake Titicaca, which the Peruvians, as far back as the time of the Spanish conquest, beheld with wonder as the remains of a more ancient people—raised, according to their traditions, in a single night—and similar creations scattered in enigmatic fragments here and there over both the Americas) bear witness that their inhabitants had, in remote ages, developed a mental cultivation and a moral power which have now entirely vanished. A mere semblance of these, an attempt to bring back a period which had long passed by, seems perceptible in the kingdom and institutions of the Ircas. In Brazil no such traces of an earlier civilization have yet been discovered, and if it ever existed here it must have been in a very remote period; yet still, even the condition of the Brazilians, as of every other American people, furnishes proofs that the inhabitants of this new continent, as it is called, are by no means a modern race, even supposing we could as-



sume our Christian chronology as a measure for the age and historical development of their country. This irrefragable evidence is furnished by Nature herself, in the domestic animals and esculent plants by which the aboriginal American is surrounded, and which trace an essential feature in the history of his mental culture. The present state of the productions of Nature is a documentary proof, that in America she has been already for many thousands of years influenced by the impressing and transforming hand of man.

"It is my conviction that the first germs of development of the human race in America can be sought nowhere except in that quarter of the globe.

"Besides the traces of a primeval and, in like manner, ante-historic culture of the human race in America, as well as a very early influence on the productions of Nature, we may also adduce as a ground for these views the basis of the present state of natural and civil rights among the aboriginal Americans—I mean precisely as before observed, that enigmatical subdivision of the nations into an almost countless number of greater and smaller groups, and that almost entire exclusion and excommunication with regard to each other, in which mankind presents its different families to us in America, like fragments of a vast ruin. The history of the other nations inhabiting the earth furnishes nothing which has any analogy to this.

"This disruption of all the bands by which society was anciently held together, accompanied by a Babylonish confusion of tongues multiplied by it, the rude right of force, the never-ending tacit warfare of all against all, springing from that very disruption, appear to me the most essential, and, as far as history is concerned, the most significant point in the civil condition of the savage tribes. Such a state of society cannot be the consequence of modern revolutions. It indicates, by marks which cannot be overlooked, the lapse of many ages.

"Long continued migrations of single nations and tribes have doubtless taken place from a very early period throughout the whole continent of America, and they may have been especially the causes of dismemberment and corruption in the languages, and of a corresponding demoralization of the people. By assuming that only a few leading nations were at first dispersed like so many rays of light, mingled together and dissolved, as it were, into each other by mutual collision, and that these migrations, divisions and subsequent combinations have been continued for countless ages, the present state of mankind in America may assuredly be accounted for; but the cause of this singular misdevelopment remains, no less on that account, unknown and enigmatical.

"Can it be conjectured that some extensive

convulsion of Nature—some earthquake rending asunder sea and land, such as is reported to have swallowed up the far-famed island of *Atalantis*—has then swept away the inhabitants in its vortex? Has such a calamity filled the survivors with a terror so monstrous, as, handed down from race to race, must have darkened and perplexed their intellects, hardened their hearts, and driven them, as if flying at random from each other, far from the blessings of social life? Have, perchance, burning and destructive suns, or overwhelming floods, threatened the man of the red race with a horrible death by famine, and armed him with a rude and unholy hostility, so that, maddened against himself by atrocious and bloody acts of cannibalism, he has fallen from the god-like dignity for which he was designed, to his present degraded state of darkness? Or is this inhumanizing, the consequence of deeply rooted preternatural vices, inflicted by the genius of our race (with a severity which, to the eye of a short-sighted observer, appears throughout all nature like cruelty) on the innocent as well as on the guilty?

"It is impossible to entirely discard the idea of some general defect in the organization of the red race; for it is manifest it already bears within itself the germs of an early extinction. Other nations will live when these unblest children of the New World have all gone to their rest in the long sleep of death. Their songs have long ceased to resound, their giant edifices are mouldering down, and no elevated spirit has revealed itself in any noble effusion from that quarter of the globe. Without being reconciled with the nations of the East, or with their own fortunes, they are already vanishing away; yes, it almost appears as if no other intellectual life was allotted to them than that of calling forth our painful compassion, as if they existed only for the negative purpose of awakening our astonishment by the spectacle of a whole race of men, the inhabitants of a large part of the globe, in a state of living decay.

"In fact, the present and future condition of this red race of men, who wander about in their native land, where the most benevolent and brotherly love despairs of ever providing them with a home, is a monstrous and tangible drama, such as no fiction of the past has ever yet presented to our contemplation. A whole race of men is wasting before the eyes of its commiserating contemporaries: no power of princes, philosophy, or Christianity, can avert its proud, gloomy progress towards a certain and utter destruction."<sup>\*</sup>

\* "On the state of Civil and Natural Rights among the Aborigines of the Brazils," by C. T. Ph. Von Martius.—Synopsis, Royal Geograph. Soc. Trans. Vol. 2.

There is much of rhetoric, if not of sound philosophy, in these observations of Dr. Von Martius. By presenting, however, we do not wish to be understood to endorse them. Our object is to give, in a rapid review, the results which have followed the investigation of these subjects by competent and philosophical minds, as distinguished from the shallow hypotheses and absurd conjectures of pretenders. As already observed, America has unfortunately been the country of systems; it has called out the prejudices of the Dutch Du Pauw and the Scotch Robertson; and been the subject of innumerable essays by charlatans and fools, by George Joneses and Josiah Priests,—an array unmatched for its complacent ignorance and stupid assurance.

It has not yet been satisfactorily shown that the American race is deficient in intellect, or that there is that wide difference in their "moral nature, their affections and consciences," which some have asserted. The history of aboriginal art remains yet to be written—indeed, the extent of its development is yet to be ascertained. The glimpses which we have afforded us, entitle the nations which occupied the central parts of the continent to rank equally high, in this respect, with the people of Hindustan and the ancient Egyptians. And, as observed by Prichard, "a people who, like the Mexicans, unaided by foreigners, formed a more complete calendar than the Greeks, and had ascertained with precision the length of the solar year, could not be deficient in intelligence." A race of men which shows us an example of a far-seeing policy like that displayed in the Iroquois confederation, before having attained to that degree of civilization which everywhere else has preceded such a display of forecast and wisdom, cannot be said to exhibit the "incapacity of infancy." A people who, like the Peruvians, had civil and social institutions nearly perfect as machineries of government and national organization, "possessing an indefinite power of expansion and suited to the most flourishing condition of the empire as well as to its infant fortunes"—such a people cannot be said to exhibit the "unpliancy of old age," or to be incapable of the highest attainments to which humanity may as-

pire. Nor can it be said that a people peaceable but brave, virtuous, honest, and approaching nearer than any other example which history affords, to the poetical idea of Arcadian simplicity and happiness, like those who inhabited the country above the Gila and the valley of New Mexico—that such a people "have never felt the blessings of divine descent," but have been left to their own dark natures and "preternatural" vicious instincts!

The assertion of the incapacity of the aborigines to profit by their associations with other races, is practically disproved at the southwest, where the Florida Indians are now located. It will not be asserted, by those informed on the subject, that their condition is one whit inferior to that of their white neighbors on the frontier. When the Indians shall be treated as human beings, and not as wild animals; when they shall be relieved from the contamination of unprincipled hunters and traders, and the moral charlatanism of ignorant and narrow-minded missionaries; when we shall pursue towards them a just, enlightened, and truly Christian policy; then, if they shall exhibit no advancement, and ultimately reach a respectable rank in the scale of civilization, it will be quite time enough to pronounce upon them the severe sentence of a deficient intellect and an unhallowed heart—dead to sympathy, and incapable of higher developments. Till then, with the black catalogue of European wrongs and oppressions before him, and the grasping hand of powerful avarice at his throat, blame not the American Indian if he sternly and gloomily prefers utter extinction to an association with races which have exhibited to him no benign aspect, and whose touch has been death.

Lest, however, the tearful veil of sympathy should obscure the cold eye of philosophy, we return to our original purpose. In the next number of the Review we shall notice, in some detail, the contributions which have recently been made to the Ethnology and Archæology of America, and to the consideration of which the preceding crude and imperfect *résumé* of what has thus far been accomplished, in these departments, is only preliminary.







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